

Preserving a Piece of the Past

Grassroots group works to restore firehouse

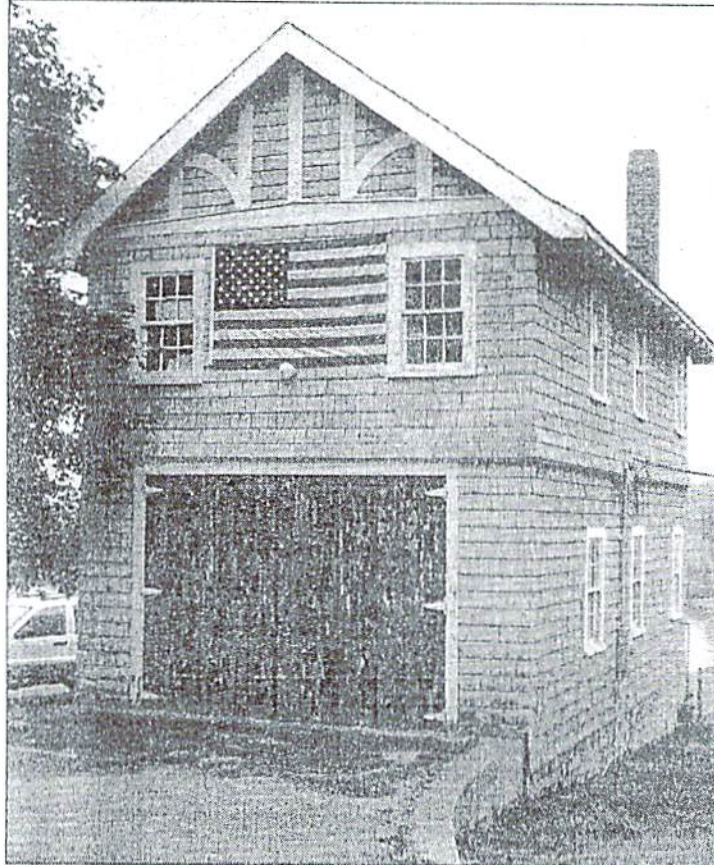
By KEITH L. MARTIN

For over 60 years, a dedicated group of firefighters known as Engine Company #1 responded to emergencies from the Bluefish River Fire House. Now an equally as dedicated group of citizens is making sure the building they called home does not become a memory.

For years, the Washington Street landmark has been passed over for town capital funds for much-needed repairs to the outside of the building, so members of the newly formed Friends of the Bluefish River Fire House have taken it upon themselves to preserve the former fire station.

"It's important because it is such a small project that could easily get lost in the shuffle, so we need to do something," said Nancy Bennett, who spearheaded the preservation project. "I grew up at the corner of Washington and Chapel streets...and it is an important building for that area and I'd hate to see it go away."

In March, town meeting voters approved \$9,800 in Community Preservation Act funds for the building's restoration, including outer shingle and roof repair and patching dozens of holes in the structure's corner boards.



Gone is the "Harbormaster" sign on the Bluefish River Fire House in favor of an American flag for July 4. A group of citizens is currently working on preserving the structure, which celebrates its 100th birthday next year.

in the restoration of the Wright Building, and feels a connection to the former fire house given its history. In 1906, the building was constructed on Saint George Street land donated by the Wright family. Two years later, it was moved to

Friends' efforts "an awesome act of preservation" and looks forward to seeing a piece of the town's fire history brought back to life in time for a centennial celebration.

"This is in keeping with the rural setting Duxbury was and keeping a piece of fire nostalgia," he said. "It will be nice to see it fixed up and perhaps see a sign indicating what it once was and how it served the town."

Bennett said that the Friends are actively working on getting monetary donations from citizens and in-kind donations from local construction and supply companies to assist in the building's preservation. Once done, they plan to work with the historical commission in getting a date-board that would read "Engine Company #1, 1906-1967."

Because it would not meet current building codes, such as Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, Bennett said that the building will never be used for anything but storage. Despite the building's inside use, however, she and others believe its outward appearance is still important to preserve.

"We are working hard to get money for this project, which is a great one for the community to be involved with," she said. "I think the neighbors will be happy as will anyone who drives by it. It's one of those places that's part of my life."

To help preserve the Bluefish River Firehouse, donations can be sent to: Friends of the Bluefish River Fire House, P.O. Box 1180, Duxbury, MA 02331.

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- Martha Himes, Friends of the Bluefish River Fire House

To help coordinate the preservation effort, Bennett recruited former colleagues on the town's historical commission and other interested citizens to see that the building gets a new lease on life.

"I've long worked in preservation and any 'endangered building' interests me," said the historical commission's Norman Tucker, a member of the Friends. "The building certainly has suffered from a certain amount of neglect, so I think shoring it up is a fabulous idea."

Tucker has been involved

Washington Street and its former home became the site of the Wright Building.

To newcomers to town, the building is only known in its current capacity of a storage building for the Harbormaster's Office, a role it has assumed since 1967, but the Friends see it as a vital link to Duxbury's past.

"Its importance to me is that it's the town's first engine house, so it has a great place in Duxbury's history," said Tucker. "There are records of all the calls responded to from that firehouse in the town archives. It's not just a garage, it has significant history."

Former historical commission chairwoman Martha Himes is also a member of the Friends and called the fire house "one of Duxbury's most charming buildings."

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Duxbury's Fire Chief, Kevin Nord, called the